

Appropriations Committee  
Legislative Office Building, Room 2C  
February 24, 2015

Dear Senator Beth Bye, Representative Toni Walker and members of the appropriations committee:

Pay it forward.

I am Elizabeth Cowles, professor of biology at Eastern Connecticut State University. Like many of you, I owe my profession to my public education teachers, from kindergarten through my post-doctoral programs. I teach students to think critically, to do better than they ever thought they could and to have faith in their own abilities.

In his February 22 column for *Forbes*, Kevin O'Marah (SCM World, a talent development organization) states "...workforce requirements lean towards problem solving, lateral thinking, and intellectual agility rather than functional technical skills." He writes that while certification programs are respected "What these bodies don't do is teach young people how to think ahead about trends that may one day make all the difference." His op-ed piece, in response to the proposed cuts to the UW system, has a unambiguous message: "If the state's students are deprived of not only 13 percent of their funding, but also the intellectual freedom to look over the horizon, then some of what makes Wisconsin great will be lost."

Dick Iannuzzi said "New York's system of public higher education is the essential path to economic opportunity and equality for our students." Public education is often seen as a personal benefit rather than as an advantage to society. This is a mistake: public education is the foundation for our nation. How can we best meet our collective economic and civic needs? Public education produces a well-educated citizenry equipped with the skills needed for our collective futures.

Only a generation ago, students completing degrees from public institutions had the golden opportunity to climb the socioeconomic ladder, unfettered with crippling personal and family debt. This particularly American Dream of the path to success in our society is morphing into a dystopian reality where only the relatively wealthy may graduate from four year colleges without a heavy burden of debt. The non-wealthy students we serve, unless the trends for public funding of four-year colleges changes, can expect to earn their degrees, only to be financially indebted for many years as they dig out of college debt. Tuition at the Connecticut State Universities has grown 20% in the past five years, in attempts to make up for a decrease in state support from covering 44% of our overall costs in 2010 to only 31% of our costs today (CT Mirror).

Eighty percent of Connecticut State University alumni remain in the state, and are productive citizens. Alumni include CT State Representative David Kiner (59<sup>th</sup> district), Eastern '06, a public servant, Corey Paris, Western '14 is an admissions counselor for the University of New Haven, and Michael Markowicz, Central '03 is an associate at Murtha/Cullina Attorneys-at-Law. Justin Firth, Eastern '05, is an IT specialist and Maria Pappa, Eastern '07 is a social worker in

the Manchester Public Schools. Committee chair Toni Walker earned her B.A. from Southern. My first independent study student, Ryan Zengou, Eastern '99, is a neurosurgeon at the UConn Health Center.

In "Challenges Facing Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century" Ami Zusman writes about the public-government social contract in public higher education "Such a contract would acknowledge higher education's role in and responsibilities for achieving broader societal goals, government's responsibility to provide institutions and individuals the resources, autonomy and flexibility necessary to realize these goals, and the public's willingness to endorse and support these agreements and to pay higher education's costs individually and collectively."

(<http://www.educationanddemocracy.org/Resources/Zusman.pdf>) Is Connecticut willing to conduct due diligence in such a contract?

We have a shared future in the great state of Connecticut. Pay it forward.